



Klamath Network Featured Creature

August 2011

California Thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

The California Thrasher is an alert, medium sized (ca. 30 cm long) songbird with a striking large decurved (downwardly curving) bill. The bird is a nondescript dark brown in color, with orange undertail coverts and buffy underparts, yet is often heard before seen due to its raucous singing in the typically dense shrubby vegetation it inhabits. Eyes show a dark iris, a dark eye-line, and fierce insectivorous intensity. Its lively personality makes it a delight to birders of the Golden State.

The California Thrasher is a dashing runner but relatively weak flier, vigorously and often noisily digging for invertebrates and seeds in the chaparral leaf litter. It shares a number of physical characteristics (strong legs, a long tail, a decurved bill) with its ecological counterparts in other shrubland regions of the world, such as the babblers in Australia, certain Old World larks, the Central American Queo; and especially the bandurillas in Chilean matorral, (Cody 1998). Sexes are alike.

Reproduction:

Individuals form long-term relationships; pairs are often found foraging and sometimes singing together. The breeding season is extended (December to July), and territorial activity intensifies with the start of the winter rains, usually in November. Most pairs raise 2 broods between Feb and Jun with a clutch size of 2-4 eggs. Eggs and young are susceptible to predation by Western Scrub-Jays (*Aphelocoma californica*).



California Thrasher
Photo Credit: <http://en.wikipedia.org>



Features of the California Thrasher
Credit: From the Sibley Guide to Birds by David Sibley



Range of California Thrasher
Courtesy of Breeding Bird Survey

Habitat:

Grinnell's (1917) study of the niche relationships of the California Thrasher is a classic read by students of ecology around the world. The California Thrasher is endemic to the coastal and foothill areas of the California Floristic Province, especially chaparral, but spilling into adjacent woodland habitats.

As a ground foraging species, it uses its long, curved bill to search for seeds and insects under dense shrubs, creating small pits in the ground surface.

This species relies on dense vegetation to hide their nest which is built near the ground inside thick brush or scrubby trees. The lack of thick vegetation is usually a limiting factor on where this species occurs.

Because they live in an area of California prone to dense population and habitat conversion and associated threats (cats). These birds are considered particularly vulnerable.

Where to See It in the Klamath Parks:

The California Thrasher is only recorded in Whiskeytown NRA.

References for *Toxostoma redeviva*:

Grinnell, 1917. The Niche Relationships of the California Thrasher. *The Auk* 34: 427-433

Cody, Martin L. 1998. California Thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 323 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D. C.